DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 103 924 CS 501 018

AUTHOR Weitzel, Al R.
TITLE The Dyadic Exchange: A Useful Exercise in Teaching Interpersonal Communication.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Educational Philosophy; Higher Education; Instructional Materials; *Interpersonal Relationship; Self Concept; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Dyadic Communication

ABSTRACT

A classroom exercise for use in teaching interpersonal communication is described. The dyadic exchange serves a pedagogical function similar to that served by student speeches in teaching public speaking. The essential utility of the activity is that it provides a structured classroom opportunity to observe interpersonal communication for the purpose of arriving at generalizations about interpersonal communication. The dyadic exchange functions best for pedagogic purposes as a conflict situation in which each participant inquires into another's ideas and reveals his "self." The procedures for utilizing the activity are described. (Author)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED107774

Al R. Weitzel
Assistant Professor
Department of Speech Communication
San Diego State University
San Diego, Ca. 92115

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Al R. Weitzel
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

The Dyadic Exchange: A Useful Exercise in Teaching Interpersonal Communication

A classroom exercise for use in teaching interpersonal communication is described. The dyadic exchange serves a pedagogical function similar to that served by student speeches in teaching public speaking. The essential utility of the activity is that it provides a structured classroom opportunity to observe interpersonal communication for the purpose of arriving at generalizations about interpersonal communication. The dyadic exchange functions best for pedagogic purposes as a conflict situation in which each participant inquires into another's ideas and reveals his "self." The procedures for utilizing the activity are described.

CS 501 018

The Dyadic Exchange: A Useful Exercise in Teaching Interpersonal Communication

Traditional public speaking pedagogy has been served well by having students deliver speeches in the classroom. Students receive the practical experience of preparing and delivering speeches, thus applying "theories" of speech making and exemplifying various propositions about speaking. Instructors are generally able to assess the adequacies of speeches by measuring them against some set of criteria or speech model. However, some instructors are still seeking a classroom activity that serves them in teaching interpersonal communication in the same way that classroom speeches have served public speaking pedagogy. This essay will suggest a possible answer by providing an exercise and by describing the procedures in using it. The exercise involves two students. The exercise may also involve three students (in a triadic exchange) and this option will be discussed later in this essay.

The utility of the dyadic exchange exercise is that it provides a structured, classroom opportunity to observe interpersonal communication (though in a somewhat "controlled" or artificial circumstance) for the purpose of inductively arriving at generalizations about interpersonal communication. Several recent speech communication textbooks have discussed interpersonal communication conceptually and have noted its place in society.[1] However, for pedagogic purposes the dyadic exchange exercise has the advantage of applying communication principles to "live," observable situations. Classroom discussions may then focus on describing interpersonal communication, comparing the phenomena to conceptual discussions, and arriving at generalizations.

For pedagogic purposes the exercise functions best as a conflict situation. Interpersonal conflict seems to accent communication factors more than some other types of communication situations, such as strictly "social" conversation. As such, the dyadic exchange matches individuals who do not agree on some subject which is of some importance to them. The two students are assigned to be prepared to discuss some subject several days in advance of the activity in order to give them time to think about the topic and to do research. In order to maximize the candor of their exchange in class, they are discouraged from discussing the subject with their partner; however they are told that their partner probably disagrees with their view of the subject. They are also advised that this is to be a candid 7-10 minute conversation which is not merely an interview of one person by the other and is not an argument or debate which is "won."[2] They are told that the exercise is to be an exchange of the type that is perhaps best characterized by a candid conversation in the student union or in a tavern. Finally, they are told that there are two purposes which they should seek to accomplish in the exchange:

1) to inquire into the other participant and his ideas
2) to inform the other participant about your "self" and your ideas.[3]

Beginning on a specified date, each 7-10 minute exchange is conducted in front of the classroom and observed and discussed by the class. As in a series of classroom speeches, it might be best to observe the first two exchanges before discussing them; this procedure facilitates observations about the communication without

focusing discussion solely on two persons. For the remainder of the exchanges, class analysis and discussion follows immediately after each exchange. In all cases, discussion focuses on 1) describing the interpersonal communication phenomena, and 2) assessing the impact of the communication.[4] For example, was forward progress evident in the exchange? What contributed to progress? Was a great deal of hard data used? Did the data aid or inhibit progress? What kinds of questions were asked by the participants? Discussions will focus on factors and variables which were similar and dissimilar in the exchanges. Complementary textbook observations about interpersonal communication may also be considered.

After all exchanges have been observed, students are asked to make generalizations which are based almost solely on the exchanges. A short paper is assigned in which students are asked to make generalizations about interpersonal communication. For example, "'Overkill' of data used by one person inhibits the open-ness of the other." Or, "definition of terms contributes to a systematic discussion of the topic." Each generalization ought to be briefly explicated and, if possible, ought to make reference to one or more of the exchanges. A useful, insightful summary of interpersonal communication often results from a discussion of the papers in class.

Conducting the Exercise

As mentioned earlier, the dyadic exchange seems to function best for pedagogic purposes as a conflict situation.[5] The steps in designing conflict dyads are as follows:

1.) Derive a set of topics for communication. Ask students to submit a list of three or more issues or topics which are, to them, interesting, significant, appropriate, and controversial. The assignment ought to be made without advising the students of the precise purpose of the list, mentioning only that the topics are for use in communicating in the classroom. From these topics the instructor may derive a list of topics which allow for maximum controversy.[6] The list ought to include a greater number of topics than the number of dyads which will be used because some topics will not elicit strong disagreement due to student homogeneity of opinions or instructor errors in phrasing topics.

2.) Elicit student opinions on each topic. This is best done with a questionnaire, though it need not necessarily by done by the following systematic means. Again, students are not advised of the precise intent of the questionnaire; they are merely told that their opinions are being solicited for classroom use only and that this procedure is not a part of any research effort. Each student's opinion on each topic is measured by three pairs of adjective scales adapted from established research procedures.[7] This writer found that a fourth scale is very useful in assessing a student's involvement in each issue, though more sophisticated and complex procedures are available for that purpose.

(Figure 1 here or as soon hereafter as possible.)

Figure 1 is a replica of the questionnaire used (though the questionnaire requires two typed pages to accomodate fifteen different

topics.) It may be administered in class within ten to twenty minutes. Administration of the questionnaire includes the following instructions read orally, and an example on the chalkboard of how the instructor might respond to a topic such as "Government Censorship of the Press."

> Instructions: Note that there are seven steps on each scale. A mark at one end of the scale means "extremely." A mark in the second position from the end means "quite." A mark in the position third from the end means "slightly." A mark in the middle position on any scale means that you are neutral.
>
> Also note that all positive values are not on one side of the scales. Nor are all negative values on one side of the scales. They are deliberately reversed in some cases. Read the scales carefully.

3.) Use the questionnaire to determine A) the topics in which each student is involved, and B) his opinion on those topics. Coding the questionnaires may be alien to some instructors, but they will not find it difficult or time-consuming. Coding twenty-five questionnaires may take fifteen minutes, exclusive of the time required to match dyads.

A) On the fourth scale, if the student designated his position in the fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh position he is considered involved:

Involved 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Uninvolved

Note those topics in which he is involved by placing a checkmark in the margin.

B) Code the student's opinion only on those topics in which he is involved by using responses to the first three scales:

Foolish	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Wise
Safe	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Dangerous
Unjustified	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Justified

Sum the scores on the three scales and note the sum in the margin. If the sum-score ranges from 3-6, the student views the topic as highly unacceptable and he ought to be matched with a student who finds the topic highly acceptable. If the student's sum-score ranges from 18-21, he views the topic as highly acceptable.[8]

4.) Match a student involved in a topic with another student with an opposite extreme opinion. Matching dyads may be difficult at times and may be the most time-consuming stage. Some students' questionnaires may indicate an extreme opinion and involvement in no topic; this may be their true opinion or they may have erred in completing the questionnaire. Or pairing may be difficult for other reasons. However some reasonable approximation of the matching procedure has always been possible.

5.) Have the student dyads publicly discuss the topics for 7-10 minutes, as described previously.

6.) After each exchange elicit students' reactions and observations.

7.) When all exchanges have been observed, assign a short paper (1-2 pages) which includes 3-5 propositional statements (generalizations) about the relationships between two or more factors or variables. Discussion of each proposition should specifically refer to one or

more of the exchanges.

The Triadic Exchange

Dyads seem best for this exercise but one or more triads may be used with success. They represent a reasonable solution in some cases to the problems of matching discussed earlier, such as placement of the student with no extreme involvement or extreme opinion. In addition, an odd number of students in a class may necessitate the assignment of at least one triad. A three-person interpersonal exchange differs in some ways from a dyad, but both situations seem within the realm of interpersonal communication, as opposed to small group communication. One might also accurately reason that the triad cannot be a bi-polar conflict situation like that of a bi-polar dyad situation. For example, though all three students should be involved in the topic and should have extreme opinions, one student's opinion must oppose the other two. These differences have been accomodated in class discussions and student papers by focusing on them as different levels of variables. For instance, a propositional statement which is often argued is that "triads differ from dyads in that alliances tend to form and to inhibit the amount of participation by the un-allied member." Or "seating position is of greater importance in a triad than in a dyad." Finally, a difference between dyads and triads is appropriately imposed by the instructor in increasing the time limit of the exchange to fifteen minutes.

Criteria for Assessing and Discussing the Dyadic Exchange

Just as criteria reflect the important aspects of a speech, the criteria for a dyadic exchange also reflect dimensions of interpersonal communication. The criteria may vary in terms of the level of sophistication of students or of the investigation, or they may vary in terms of an accompanying textbook.

(Figure 2 here or as soon hereafter as possible.)

Figure 2 represents a set of criteria which have been used with success. The selection of these criteria seeks to represent a description of candid interpersonal communication within some observable categories. The term "cues" has been selected to articulate some specific, observable features of the criteria.[9] For example, students will try to determine the effects of lengthy statements; (they may stifle continued interaction or perpetuate lengthy responses). Or abstract opinions by one participant may facilitate face-saving by the other. As more exchanges are observed, students will become more familiar with the criteria and their effects. Thus, the student's understanding of interpersonal communication is enhanced.

The dyadic exchange exercise is designed as an activity which focuses on interpersonal communication. It may be useful as a unit in a beginning speech course or in other interpersonal communication courses. The activity demands some classroom time. Generally two exchanges and subsequent classroom discussions occupy a fifty-minute class session. But the activity is a worthwhile one which students find valuable and enjoyable.

[1]For example, William D. Brooks, Speech Communication (Dubuque, 1971); John W. Keltner, Interpersonal Speech-Communication (Belmont, California, 1970); James C. McCroskey, Carl E. Larson, and Mark L. Knapp, An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Englewood Cliffs, 1971); John R. Wenburg and William W. Wilmot, The Personal Communication Process (New York, 1973).

[2]See Brooks, Chapter 7, "Dyadic Communication," for a comparison of types of two-person conversations.

[3]For a discussion of the concept of "self" in communication, see, for example, Maurice Natanson, Introduction 2, "The Claims of Immediacy," Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation ed., Maurice Natanson and Henry W. Johnstone (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1965); Brooks, Chapter 4, "Self-Concept in Communication;" Keltner, Chapter 2, "Central Binding Elements," and Chapter 3, "Who is Talking to Whom: The Many Faces of You."

[4]Since the exercise is based upon a conflict situation, some argumentation is likely to result during the exchange. However, the emphasis of the activity is upon inquiry and exchange of information.

[5]The activity is based on the social judgment-involvement approach to communication. Interested readers may wish to consult Carolyn W. Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, and Roger E. Nebergall, Attitude and Attitude Change: The Social Judgment-Involvement Approach (Philadelphia, 1965); and Kenneth K. Sereno, "Ego-Involvement: A Neglected Variable in Speech-Communication Research," Quarterly Journal of Speech LV (February, 1969), 69-77.

[6]A useful analysis of the controversiality of issues is offered by Lewis A. Froman and James K. Skipper, "Factors Related to Misperceiving Party Stands on Issues," Public Opinion Quarterly XXVI (Summer, 1963), 265-272. They point out that "style issues," such as air pollution, are really topics which allow for little controversy. On the other hand, "position issues" are topics about which people genuinely disagree. To increase controversiality, an instructor might modify "women's liberation" to read "public demonstrations for women's liberation," or "wiretaping" to read "increased surveillance and police powers."

[7]Kenneth K. Sereno and C. David Mortensen, "The Effects of Ego-Involved Attitudes on Conflict Negotiation in Dyads," Speech Monographs XXXVI (March, 1969), 8-12.

[8]Sereno and Mortensen, 10.

[9]The term is borrowed from Dean C. Barnlund, "A Transactional Model of Communication," Foundations of Communication Theory ed., Kenneth K. Sereno and C. David Mortensen (New York, 1970), pp. 83-102.

FIGURE 1

Name _____

For each of the concepts or actions below, you will find four descriptive, bi-polar adjective scales. You are asked to react to each concept or action in two ways. First, place an "X" on each of the first three scales to represent what is for you the most appropriate reaction to that concept or action. Second, go to the fourth scale to indicate the degree to which you feel involved in in subject, (i.e., the degree to which you find the subject relevant, meaningful, or interesting).

1. (topic)

Foolish	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Wise
Safe	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Dangerous
Unjustified	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Justified
Involved	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Uninvolved

2. (topic)

Foolish	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Wise
Safe	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Dangerous
Unjustified	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Justified
Involved	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Uninvolved

. . . . . .

15. (topic)

Foolish	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Wise
Safe	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Dangerous
Unjustified	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Justified
Involved	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	Uninvolved

FIGURE 2

DYADIC EXCHANGE

A dyadic activity which is not merely "social conversation," is not a one-way interview, and is not debate

Purposes: To inquire into the other participant and his ideas
To inform the other participant about your "self" and ideas
(7-10 minute time limitation)

Participants:

Subject of Exchange:

Criteria:

Two-way interaction
- Cues:
  - Length of statements
  - Candidness: interrupted statements, etc.
  - Over-politeness

Information giving
- Cues:
  - Hard data: examples, case studies, etc.
  - Abstractions
  - Information balance among participants

Information seeking
- Cues:
  - Types and purposes of questions
    - Seeks information
    - Seeks opinions
    - Seeks confrontation

Purposeful: Stays within limits
- Cues:
  - Use of definitions

Open-ness
- Cues:
  - Degrees of open-ness and changes in open-ness
  - Language intensity
  - Selective perception
  - Face-saving
  - Vocal cues (loudness, pitch, etc.)
  - Other nonverbal cues (posture, spatial, facial, etc.)

Dynamic interaction
- Cues:
  - Systematic framework and discussion of ramifications
  - Forward progress
  - Rate of delivery and rate of ideas
  - A satisfactory wrap-up (conclusion)

Informative for audience